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Transfer Credit: Meeting the Challenge

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Objective of this Presentation

- Share lessons learned by York University on systems support of student mobility from an admissions and registrarial perspective
- Context:
 - *What were some of issues York U had to address as we worked to make the systems support of transfer credit processes more scalable?*

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York University

- Two campuses: Keele Campus on north border of Toronto and Glendon campus located in mid-town Toronto; plus a few satellite centres in and around city
- Third largest university in Canada with 54,000 students, 7000 faculty and staff
- 10 faculties; soon to be 11
- Full range of undergraduate and graduate programs, professional schools, research centres, continuing education, etc.

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Student Mobility in Ontario

- Ontario Colleges:
 - 28 public colleges in Ontario
 - Offer 2 and 3 year diploma and certificate programs
 - Degree programs in applied areas of study (e.g. Business Admin, Hospitality)
 - Colleges also offer collaborative programs with universities (e.g. Nursing, Early Childhood Education, Journalism)

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Student Mobility in Ontario

- Ontario Universities
 - 20 public universities in Ontario
 - 3 and 4 year undergraduate bachelor degrees
 - Stand-alone certificate programs
 - Non-degree studies (Upgrading, Letters of Permission)
 - International exchange programs
 - Graduate programs, masters, PHD and diplomas



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Student Mobility in Ontario

- Other Programs
 - Baccalaureate studies
 - Private schools offering “AP” level courses
- Incoming students from outside Ontario
 - Other provinces and their various systems
 - International including USA
- This presentation will focus on mobility between colleges and universities in Ontario

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Some statistics...


- About 8.5% of Ontario college graduates move on to attend university
- The largest number of Ontario college students transfer to York (23%) and Ryerson (14%)
- College students tend to go to Universities in the geographic area where they attended college
- University transfers also occur but no statistics available

• Source: Decock, H., McCloy, U., Liu, S & Hu, B. (2011). The Transfer Experience of Ontario Colleges who Further their Education – An analysis of Ontario's College Graduate Satisfaction Survey. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

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The Case for Change at York



- MTCU reporting: requirement for easily accessible data
- Provincial focus on “pathways”
- Faculty restructuring 2009
- Online degree audit system
- Increasing volumes and expectations
- Enhance clarity for students, advisers, administrators



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Systems at York University

- York University’s student information system is home-grown, in-house developed
 - we have to re-invent and renew systems
 - can build the system to suit our needs
- Where we started:
 - A good suite of tools and systems that needed to be cleaned up, enhanced, more tightly integrated to ensure we could support our needs

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Systems at York University

- Transfer Credit databases: historical information on equivalencies granted
- Reports and workflows to support assessment process
- Automated degree audit since 2006
- Online degree progress reports for students since 2009 with continual improvement and rollout



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Issues

- Good tools but built in a “siloeed” manner
- Process has grown faster than our system did in requirements and volumes
- Need for greater integration between assessments and student record
- Need for more structured data to facilitate reporting and integration



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So What Did We Have to Do?

- Revisit and review all our processes and controls around assessing studies for transfer credit
- Develop plans to clean up data and develop and launch system enhancements as well as new system developments
- All while still admitting and assessing new transfer students each year

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Transfer Credit Policy

- The issues:
 - Long-established policies at the university level
 - Interpretations at the local level had evolved over time
 - Expertise and knowledge resting with highly experienced individuals

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Policy vs Procedure



- Why do we do things the way we do them?
- Is it policy?
- Or it is practice that has developed over the years?
- To change policy >>> Governance
- To change practice >>> In-depth analysis and implementation

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Underlying Challenge

- Academic regulations differ among different faculties and programs
 - Some are result of professional accreditation needs
 - Others are about differing philosophies around program structure
- Problem
 - Students move around a lot and transfer credit decisions need to move easily with them

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Back to Basics

- Developed harmonized implementation guidelines
 - Agreed to and updated definitions
 - Established terminology i.e. a shared language
 - Dug through relevant university and faculty policies and regulations
 - Compared and examined differences at local level and asked “why”

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Results


- Our existing policies were reaffirmed
- Transfer Credit Implementation Guidelines (2008)
- Consensus on practices was reached in many areas
- Streamlining introduced for assessment
- Deeper understanding of transfer credit “universe”
- Identified credit by institution and program student came from
- Some differences did remain but better understood

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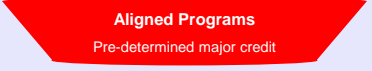
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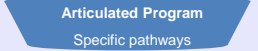
Transfer Credit for Ontario Colleges




Policy Pathways
block credit which may or may not include major credit



Aligned Programs
Pre-determined major credit



Articulated Program
Specific pathways



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Policy Pathways for Ontario CAAT's

- Block Credit at York
 - Block credit: recognizing the completion of a program at an Ontario CAAT by granting a total number of credits towards their York degree
 - Depending on the categorization of their program and level of completion students may also receive major credit
 - We work towards minimizing having to look through detailed transcripts for specific courses



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Policy Pathways for Ontario CAAT's

- Categorize college programs based on:
 - The level of academic outcomes with respect to preparing students for university
 - Length of program (i.e. number of semesters)
- Students completing college programs with a high degree of academic content receive a greater amount of transfer credit

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Policy Pathway: Example

- Applicant has completed a two-year General Arts & Science diploma at college; may receive:
 - Total of "30 credits" at the first and second year level of study: equivalent to one full-time year
 - Will be deemed to have satisfied their requirement to take "Social Science" general education credits

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Articulated Programs

- Formal agreement between two institutions defining a pathway students take from a college program to a university program including specific coursework and transfer credit to be granted
- A higher amount of transfer credit may be specified because coursework has been collaboratively designed to ensure specific outcomes are met
- At York we have a number of these programs but does not represent the largest portion of transferring students

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Aligned Programs

- Aligned programs as defined by York
- More specific than a a general “policy” pathway
- The program at the college aligns naturally with a particular major at the University
- Based on level of completion and nature of the program some major credit may be granted



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Aligned Program: Example

- Applicant completed an Advanced Diploma in Business Administration at Seneca College (6 semester program) admitted to: Bachelor of Administrative Studies degree at York
 - Granted a total of 42 credits at the first and/or second year level
 - Satisfies 2/3 required general education areas
 - Granted major credit for 2 first year introductory Admin Studies courses and 2 second year Admin Studies courses



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Putting Block Credit Into Practice

- Credits are “granted” and certain requirements are satisfied “waiving” the student from taking certain courses
- Student still needs to meet requirements at York i.e.: residency, major credits, upper year credits
- Because these were college courses, students MAY choose to take courses anyway; would not be considered a repeat



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Systems Challenges of Block Credit

- Depending on your system for tracking degree requirements it can be challenging allocating a “block” of transfer credits to specific requirements
- In York’s degree audit system we can code these as “exceptions” and students see requirements satisfied with transfer credit
- As students change programs we often have to re-assess impact of transfer credit



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Other Challenges

- Improving turnaround and consistency requires a high level of automation given our volumes
- Automation requires structured data and defined inputs and well-defined rules



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Examples of Data Challenges

- “Program of study” was not a required field on the university application at OUAC (to change 2013)
- Not all colleges provide transcripts via EDI (electronic data interchange) thereby making it difficult to automate assessment
- EDI transcripts don’t consistently provide the information we need
- *Until we can get reliable inputs, we have had to design screens for staff to enter clean data*

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College Transfers: Practical Checklist

- ✓ Catalogue the various “pathways” from specific college programs to your university
- ✓ Determine how you will grant transfer credit for those programs (ie blocks, major credits, etc.)
- ✓ Determine standards for transfer credit to be granted
 - including how to work with applicants with only partial studies at a college
- ✓ Develop communications for students
- ✓ Develop a process for degree completion tracking

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University Transfers

- Not a lot of data available regarding volume of university to university transfers
 - Students transferring from one university to another
 - Students studying on “letter of permission”
 - Formal “co-registration” arrangements between universities
 - International Exchange



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Specified Transfer Credit

- At York when we deal with University transfers, we are working to assign “specified” transfer credit
- Ideal: course to course equivalencies
- Reality: not always a straight-forward, easy exercise

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Implementation Challenges

- Differences in course and program delivery among universities
- Process for assessing the courses
- Professional accreditation standards
- Applying the credit towards degree studies completion



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Differences in Program Delivery

- Year levels for equivalent courses may vary between schools
- Differences in grading schemes
- Differences in “credit weight” between schools
- Course delivery differences ie two half-year courses vs one full-year



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Implementation Challenges

- Courses with no direct equivalent
 - May be able to identify a subject area and year level (e.g. Humanities, 2nd year) but not a direct equivalent
- Professional accreditation standards
 - When course was taken may be an issue
 - e.g. “5 year rule” for Computer Science courses or 2 year rule for Nursing



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Processing Challenges

- Process for assessing courses:
 - Getting course syllabus from original school may be challenging especially for older courses
 - Time-consuming process for Faculty to review and approve
- Applying credit towards degree studies
 - Because of differences may be complex to directly correlate to a requirement at York



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Implementing Specified Credit

- What we've done at York
 - Maintained a database of all course equivalencies granted at Admissions
 - Over time we've built up a historical catalogue of all decisions so that we only need to solicit reviews of courses we haven't seen before
 - Next Steps for us
 - Cleaning up and integrating the information into a format that's easier to use across our systems



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Mobility Challenges

- As students are encouraged to embrace mobility options in Ontario we have to rethink a number of processes e.g.
 - How to pre-determine transfer credit
 - How to enforce policies on repeating courses
 - Pre-requisites, co-requisites
 - Enforcing GPA requirements for progression
 - Helping students to track towards degree completion



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The Future of Transfer Credit

- Greater integration of data and processes across systems to improve turnaround
- Reporting and analysis; gaining more insight into the academic experience of transferring students
- Student Self-Serve options: more up front information; pre-determining transfer credit
- Aligning with and leveraging provincial initiatives

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Questions?

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